



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN SPENCE

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING WITH MILITARY SERVICE CHIEFS

The committee meets this afternoon to receive testimony from the Service Chiefs on the overall state of our military forces. As the fiscal year 2000 budget cycle winds down and the fiscal year 2001 budget cycle gears up, it is a good time to take stock of where we are and where we are going.

Many things have changed since the Chiefs appeared before this committee back in February. What has not changed, however, is that despite significant congressional increases in the defense budget this year, and over the past five years, serious mismatches still exist between the requirements imposed on the services and the resources being budgeted to address them.

Since the Chiefs' testimony last February, the United States and its NATO allies fought a 78-day air campaign against Yugoslavia. As a result, we are now involved in another seemingly open-ended peacekeeping operation in the Balkans, with additional unanticipated costs and risks.

For the Air Force, Operation Allied Force became the equivalent of a major theater war. At the height of the air campaign, a greater percentage of today's Air Force was flying over the Balkans than was deployed during the Persian Gulf War. Reduced in size nearly 40 percent since 1991, the Air Force was forced to draw critical assets from other theaters in order to meet the demands of the Kosovo conflict. This had a domino-like effect as the Air Force and other services had to move forces around and implement a number of stop-gap measures in other critically important theaters.

The stress on the Army has also increased this year, as two full Army divisions are now tied up just in the training and deployment cycle supporting peacekeeping operations in the Balkans. As we all know, these peacekeeping operations have diminished the combat capability of units deployed in the Balkans, as well as those remaining at home.

While it is important that we have a flexible and responsive Army as we move into the 21st Century, I consider it vital that our Army remain prepared to fight those conflicts that most threaten our primary national interests. I look forward to learning more about how the Army's new vision balances the requirements of our national military strategy – which dictate that we fight and win two major theater wars – with the requirements of peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.

(MORE)

The Navy also confronts daunting challenges. Admiral Johnson was recently quoted as saying that “We run unacceptable risks by going below 300 ships,” and that “the current level of shipbuilding is insufficient to preserve even that level of fleet in the coming decades”. Admiral Vernon Clark, Commander of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, stated not long ago that shortfalls in the Navy translate into “high risk” for implementing the nation’s military strategy.

The constant strain of deployment is also taking its toll on the Marine Corps. Today’s Corps is as active around the world as it has ever been, yet it is operating with smaller end-strength and older equipment than it was at the beginning of this decade.

The challenges facing the services are not only symptoms of a more dangerous world, but I believe also of the Administration’s refusal to provide the resources necessary to execute the military strategy at a low level of risk. The result of this mismatch is higher risk for a force that continues to suffer with debilitating quality of life, readiness and modernization shortfalls.

Earlier this year, the Chiefs testified that the services had more than \$150 billion in critical unfunded requirements over the next five to six years. Even with optimistic economic assumptions and budget gimmicks (most of which have not come to pass or were rejected), the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2000 budget request fell well short of meeting the unfunded requirements identified by the Chiefs.

I will be the first to admit that we spend too much time arguing over spending levels, but this unfortunate reality is an inevitable result of an executive branch that has taken a budget-driven approach to the nation’s security requirements – something we have all seen going back to the Bottom Up Review and continuing through the last QDR. As I have said before, our strategy must be threat-driven, not budget driven. We should set the strategy, cost it out and then debate questions of affordability and questions of tradeoffs between strategy and resources.

Yet even now, it appears that the Administration may once again be looking to scale back requirements to more closely reflect declining budgets. One recent report indicated that draft changes to the national security strategy being considered by the National Security Council reflect Secretary Aspin’s 1993 proposed “Win-Hold-Win” strategy – a proposal intended to rationalize deeper than advertised defense spending cuts, and one that was rejected overwhelmingly, bipartisanly and internationally.

Risk is the bottom line – risk in terms of protecting and promoting our global interests, and risk to those individuals who we ask to go in harm’s way everyday. And in my opinion, risk is already too high today and it continues to grow.

To help us address these difficult issues, I want to once again welcome:

- General Eric Shinseki, Chief of Staff of the Army. General, let me congratulate you on your new job and welcome you to your first appearance before the committee as Chief;
- Admiral Jay Johnson, Chief of Naval Operations;
- General Michael Ryan, Chief of Staff of the Air Force; and
- General James Jones, Commandant of the Marine Corps. General Jones, let me also congratulate you and welcome you before the committee for the first time in your capacity as Commandant.